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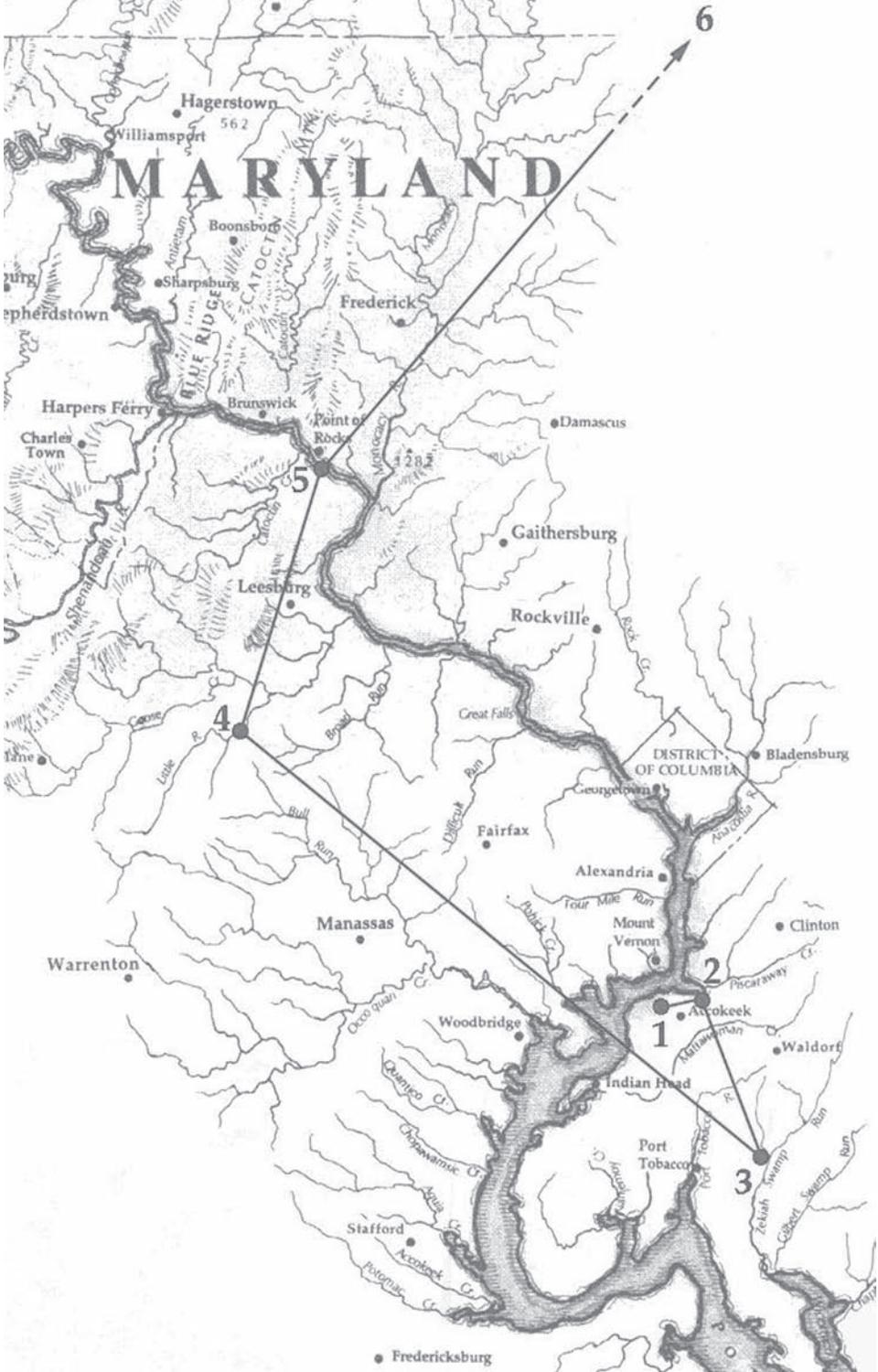
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# Research Notes & Maryland Miscellany

## A Closer Look at the “Last Appearance” of the Conoy Indians

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For more than a century, anthropological and archeological literature has repeated some variation of the statement that the Conoy (Piscataway) Indians “made their last appearance as a separate tribe at a council held at Detroit in 1793.” The statement appears to originate with ethnographer James Mooney, who a few years later added the detail that the Conoy “used the turkey as their signature.”<sup>1</sup> Subsequent scholars have reiterated Mooney’s statement as fact, with Alice Ferguson adding that just fifty members of the tribe remained at the time the council met. This article dissects this oft-repeated statement and evaluates its three main components: the last record of the Conoy as a tribe was in Detroit in 1793; the Conoy signed a document using a turkey symbol as their signature; and fifty tribal members remained in 1793.<sup>2</sup>

The Piscataway Indians were among the first native groups that early European explorers and settlers encountered in what is now Maryland. Captain John Smith made note of their villages during his exploration of the Chesapeake Bay region in 1608–1609, and Governor Leonard Calvert met with their leader Wannis in 1634 to request permission to settle in the area. Colonial records preserved in the *Archives of Maryland* provide a rich accounting of colonial interaction with the Piscataway and allow us to trace the main group’s subsequent movements from the Piscataway Fort on Piscataway Creek to Zekiah Fort (1680) to the Virginia Piedmont (1697)

*Early movement of the Piscataway Indians. (1) Moyaons, 1608; (2) Piscataway Fort/Kittamaquund, ca. 1634–1680; (3) Zekiah Fort, 1680–ca. 1697; (4) Fort above Occoquan, Virginia, 1697–1699; (5) Heater’s (Conoy) Island, 1699–ca. 1712; (6) Conejoholo and Conoy Town, Pennsylvania, ca. 1705–ca. 1743. [Author’s image.]*

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84. Brothers, we shall be persuaded that you mean to do us justice; if you agree that the Ohio shall remain the boundary line between us. — If you will not consent thereto, our meeting will be altogether unnecessary: This is the great point, which we desired would have been explained before you left your home, so our message left you was principally directed to obtain that information.

Done in general council at the foot of the Miami rapid, the 13<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1793

Wyandots  
 Shawanese  
 Miami  
 Ottawa  
 Chickasaw  
 Seneca of the Glare  
 Poutawatamie  
 Comoye  
 Muncy  
 Nanticoke  
 Nottoway

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Wyandots, .....                |    |
| Seven Nations of Canada, ..... |    |
| Delawares, .....               |   |
| Shawanese, .....               |  |
| Miami, .....                   |  |
| Ottawas, .....                 |  |
| Chickasaw, .....               |  |
| Seneca of the Glare, .....     |  |
| Poutawatamie, .....            |  |
| → Comoye, .....                |  |
| Muncy, .....                   |  |
| Nanticoke, .....               |  |
| Nottoway, .....                |  |

and back to Maryland at Conoy (now Heater’s) Island (1699), where they remained until at least 1712. Sometime after, this main body of Piscataway Indians abandoned Maryland for Pennsylvania, where they came to be known by the Anglicized version of their Iroquoian name, Conoy. They moved from their original settlement at Conejoholo to Conoy Town in 1718, to Shamokin in 1743, and then to Juniata in 1749, where they resided with other nations, including the Nanticokes. In 1754, the Conoy and the Nanticoke moved to Otsiningo, New York. After this time, reference to the Conoy appears to be restricted to their presence at treaties and councils. In October 1758 a group of Conoy Indians was among the Six Nations Indians present at a treaty in Easton, Pennsylvania. In September 1776, the “Connoys” attended a grand Indian council at Niagara. And last, in 1793, they were present at the council at Detroit discussed in this article.<sup>3</sup>



### **The Conoy Indians and the Western Indian Confederacy**

How the Conoy came to be part of the 1793 council, or by what route they arrived in the central Great Lakes region, is unknown. What is apparent, however, is that they formed a small part of a much larger “Western Indian Confederacy” resisting the fledgling U.S. government’s attempts to seize lands in the Northwest Territory.

The November 5, 1768, Treaty of Fort Stanwix purportedly reserved lands north of the Ohio River for Native Americans, although this was largely a matter of perspective. In the treaty, the British negotiated with the Six Nations—who did not reside in the Ohio territory—to set the Ohio River as the limit of British expansion and in return, the Six Nations received land in western New York. In reality, the Native Americans occupying both sides of the Ohio River—the Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, and others—lost their lands south of the river, and later even the Six Nations were forced to cede additional land. Following the American Revolution, the American government, in its quest for expansion, essentially ignored any promises the British made or implied at Fort Stanwix. The result was a decades-long resistance on the part of the Ohio Country natives to preserve land north of the Ohio River as an Indian reserve.

By 1792, the Western Indian Confederacy had moved from the modern Fort Wayne, Indiana, area (where American forces burned some three hundred Indian houses and destroyed extensive crops in 1790) and settled at the Glaize on the Miami (Maumee) River near modern Defiance, Ohio.

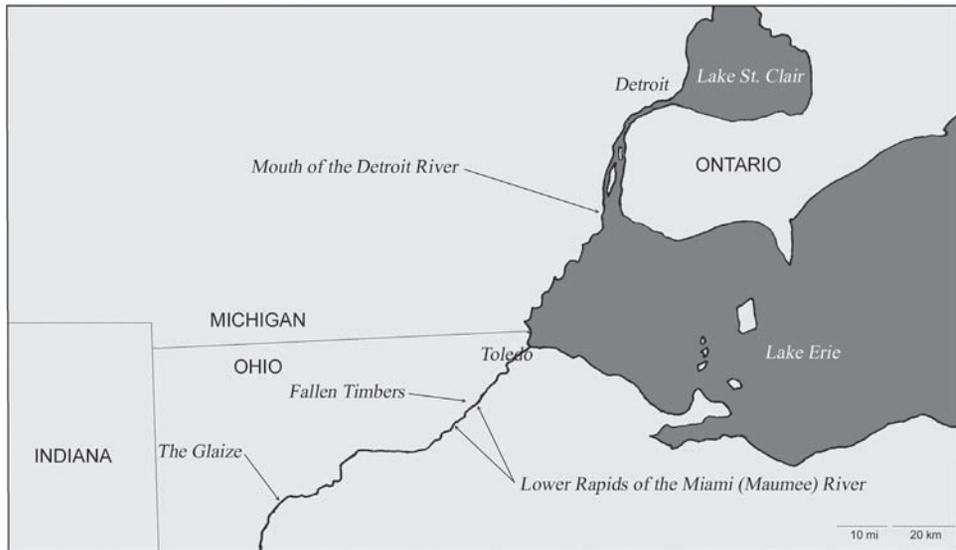
The Glaize was a former buffalo wallow situated at the confluence of the Miami, Tiffin, and Auglaize Rivers. By 1792, some two thousand confederated Indians lived at this location in seven towns: three Shawnee, two Delaware, one Miami, and one European trading town. A small group of Conoy lived in Big Cat’s Town, one of the

*A copy of the signature page from the Western Indians’ message to the Commissioners of the United States, August 13, 1793. Arrow indicates signature line for the Connoys [sic], and their use of a turkey symbol. (Papers of the War Department, WFG17, p. 8.)*

Delaware settlements. And it was here at the Glaize—in the Shawnee Captain Johnny's Town—that the Conoy (along with the Shawnee, Wyandot, Delaware, Munsee, Miami, Nanticoke, Mahigan, Ottawa, Chippewa, Patawatomí, Cherokee, Creek, Sauk, Fox, Ouatennon, Six Nations, and Seven Nations of Lower Canada) participated in the Grand Indian Council during September and October of 1792. The group agreed to demand that the federal government uphold the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix by which lands north of the Ohio River were reserved for Indian settlement.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, American forces under General Anthony Wayne's command assembled and trained in the event the negotiations failed. Hopes for a peace settlement remained, however, and in 1793 the American commissioners, based at the mouth of the Detroit River, sent communications to the leaders of the confederated Indians assembled at the foot of the Miami rapids seeking accord. On July 27, 1793, the Western Indian Confederacy wrote to the commissioners noting that the Treaty of Fort Stanwix had set the Ohio River as the boundary to Indian lands, demanding that "you will immediately remove all your people from our side of that River," and questioning the commissioners' authority to speak for the United States. Leaders of ten Indian nations signed the message including the "Connoys" who used the turkey mark. The commissioners responded four days later, acknowledging that the treaty had set the river as the boundary between the Indians and the British colonies but that subsequent treaties had ceded these lands to the United States, and therefore the American settlers could not be evicted. On August 13, the Western Indian Confederacy responded that unless the Ohio River remained the boundary of Indian lands, peace was impossible. Sixteen nations signed the message and the "Connoys" once again used the symbol of a turkey. Within days, the commissioners replied "The negotiation is therefore at an end," clearing Wayne to march against the "hostile Indians," but the approaching winter prompted him to delay the action.<sup>5</sup>

The Americans finally engaged the confederated Indians the following summer, culminating at the Battle of Fallen Timbers on August 20, 1794. Here, in a one-day battle, Wayne's nearly five thousand troops decisively defeated some fifteen hundred warriors under the command of the Shawnee Blue Jacket and the Delaware Buckongahelas, war chief from Big Cat's Town, where the Conoy resided at the Glaize. Buckongahelas commanded the largest Indian group (five hundred Delaware) at Fallen Timbers, and it is possible that number included Conoy warriors. Following the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Wayne's troops razed the towns at the Glaize (building Fort Defiance in their place), and the Western Indian Confederacy dispersed. The next year, the Treaty of Greenville ended the Northwest Indian wars and acknowledged the United States' sovereignty over the Northwest Territory. Representatives of a dozen Indian nations signed the treaty, including Buckongahelas with the Delaware. Notably, several used the turkey symbol, making it difficult to say with certainty that Conoy signed.



*Map of the Lake Erie Region. (Author's rendition.)*

### A Dwindling Population?

Assessing the Conoy population is problematic. The people of the Piscataway/Conoy nation have been estimated at one thousand to twenty-five hundred at the height of their numbers, just before first contact with Europeans. Almost a century later, however, a number of historical accounts show greatly reduced numbers. On March 25, 1697, Sir Thomas Lawrence, recounting the “Nations of Indians” in Maryland to the Earl of Bridgewater, reported, “The Emperor of Piscattaway [presumably at the fort in Zekiah Swamp] under whose subjection is contained Chapticoe and Mattawoman Indians, all which joined by other are said not to be above 80 or 90 in number.”<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, on April 21, 1699, Giles Vanderasteal and Bur Harison visited the Piscataway at their new home on Heater’s Island in the upper Potomac near Point of Rocks. They observed eighteen cabins inside the fort and nine outside, estimating twenty men, twenty women, and thirty children in addition to about sixteen “in the Inhabitance” and an unspecified number “outt a hunting.” In all, they judged the population, based on the number of cabins, at eighty or ninety bowmen. Although these numbers clearly fail to add up (unless the bowmen included men, older boys, and perhaps some women) they seem to indicate a total population of around 150.

On November 3, 1699, David Straughan and Giles Tilltet report “there is of them about Thirty men” at the fort on Heater’s Island. Estimating four people for every man/warrior counted, a population of 120 at the fort is plausible.<sup>7</sup>

Those numbers fell sharply when smallpox swept through the island in 1704. In December of that year, Colonel James Smallwood and sixteen of his men found

the fort largely abandoned. According to those who remained, the epidemic had claimed the lives of fifty-seven men, women, and children. Despite these devastating losses, a 30–40 percent mortality rate, the Piscataway recovered. By spring 1712, Baron Christoph von Graffenried visited a once-again vibrant Indian village (which he called Canavest) on Heater’s Island.<sup>8</sup>

Sometime after von Graffenried’s visit the Piscataway left Maryland for Pennsylvania. Here, known as the Conoy, they lived with the Nanticoke and other groups, often subsumed in the historical record. With one exception this historical blurring makes it difficult to recover population numbers. Yet on October 8, 1758, when a group of “Conoyos,” led by Chief Kandt (or Last Night) and including nine men, ten women, and one child, stood among the Six Nations Indians present at a treaty in Easton, Pennsylvania. It is not known whether these numbers represent the entire Conoy population, or if these people served as a smaller emissary group.<sup>9</sup>

Inferences can be drawn from the Conoy group at the Glaze in 1792. The group lived with the Delaware in Big Cat’s Town, the larger of their two villages. Although the size of the town is unknown, approximately two thousand people lived there in seven towns and the Shawnee town of Blue Jacket held approximately three hundred. It is reasonable to speculate that the “small village of Conoyos,” within that town numbered fifty people. They appear in the record again, at the foot of the Miami rapids where their leaders signed correspondence to the U.S. Commissioners on August 13, 1793, but how many were at the rapids, and if any participated in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, is unknown. No Conoy are listed as signatories to the Treaty of Greenville in January/February 1795.<sup>10</sup>

### **A Final Assessment**

The often-repeated statement that the last record of the Piscataway/Conoy as a tribe (of just fifty members) was in Detroit in 1793, where they signed a document using a turkey symbol as their signature, is incomplete. In fact, the “Connoys,” as part of the Western Indian Confederacy, signed communications in July and August of 1793, using the mark of a turkey in both instances. However, the confederacy was not in Detroit when they signed these documents but at the foot of the Miami River rapids, some ten miles southwest of present-day Toledo, Ohio. (Confusion may have stemmed from the fact that the United States Commissioners, with whom the confederated Indians were corresponding, were situated at the mouth of the Detroit River—nearly twenty miles south of present-day Detroit.) And finally, though documentary evidence has not been found, it seems reasonable that in 1793 the Conoy tribe numbered fifty or fewer members.

On the surface, the subject of this article may seem merely a pedantic exercise. However, to those it most concerns—the Piscataway/Conoy—perhaps this discussion will shed light on an obscure part of their past. The Conoy did not just “appear” in the Ohio Country in the late 1790s, sign a document, and then fade from existence.

These were an historic people who migrated as a group from their adopted homes in Pennsylvania and New York to the Glaize on the Miami River in Ohio, where they actively joined other Indian groups in a resistance movement against the forces of the burgeoning United States. And their council (not in Detroit, but at the lower falls of the Miami River), where they signed documents using the symbol of a turkey, did not involve benign, insignificant correspondence but rather a demand that the U.S. Commissioners immediately remove their settlers from Indian lands. Ultimately, the failure of both sides to reach a peaceful agreement led to the Battle of Fallen Timbers, an event that likely included Conoy who, according to Piscataway oral history, subsequently returned to their Maryland homelands where their descendants live today. Rather than simply being left with a terse statement concerning the “last appearance” of the Conoy, this expansion on an incomplete chapter of Piscataway/Conoy history should contribute to their descendants’ greater sense of identity in a modern Maryland.

### **Postscript**

Throughout this article references to the Piscataway or Conoy tribe are to the main group, commonly residing with the tribe’s chief personage (referred to as the *tayac* by the Indians, or the “Emperor” in colonial documents). In tracing the Piscataway/Conoy people from the time of their encounter with Captain John Smith to their documentary disappearance in Ohio in 1793, the focus has been on this core group. Yet, it is clear that not all tribal members acted in tandem. For example, the final Piscataway migration from Heater’s Island to Pennsylvania apparently occurred in increments staggered over at least a decade, an indication that some individuals and their families may have elected to remain behind, perhaps returning to their ancestral homeland in southern Maryland. Oral tradition among groups identifying themselves as modern Piscataways holds that numerous individuals and families lived in self-imposed isolation in remote areas of Prince George’s and Charles Counties. In fact, such a case is documented—in 1736, “George Williams, an Indian” petitioned the legislature to intercede with landowner Charles Pye to allow “the said Indian and his Family [to] live quietly upon the Land where they are now settled [on Mattawoman Neck in Prince George’s County].” That other similar Piscataway homesteads and settlements went undocumented would not be unexpected, and the modern-day resurgence of the Piscataway, initiated by Philip Proctor (Turkey Tayac) in the 1920s and 1930s and peaking in the late 1960s and 1970s, attests to the fact that the “last appearance” of the Piscataway may be a decidedly one-sided notion.<sup>11</sup>

### NOTES

The author would like to thank Maureen Kavanagh, Rico Newman, Orlando Ridout V, Gabrielle Tayac, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on an earlier version of this

paper. Julie King is acknowledged for bringing the “George Williams, an Indian” reference in the *Archives of Maryland* to my attention.

1. The turkey was used by a number of tribes on numerous treaties, etc., including the “Mohickens” and possibly the Munseys on the August 13, 1793 document shown on page 346. Various tribes often shared clan symbols (turtles, deer, and birds are very common). And since the Conoy were often “absorbed” into other groups such as the Delawares or the Nanticokes, it would be nearly impossible to identify a Conoy individual based solely on his use of the turkey. On the August 13, 1793, document it is clear that the “Connoys” used the turkey symbol because the government transcriber recorded both the tribe’s name and the turkey symbol.

2. James Mooney, “Indian Tribes of the District of Columbia,” *The American Anthropologist*, 2 (1889): 265; James Mooney and Cyrus Thomas, “Conoy,” *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, ed. by Frederick Webb Hodge (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1907), 340; Alice L. L. Ferguson, *Moyaone and the Piscataway Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Privately printed, 1937), 44; E. Ralston Goldsborough, “The Aborigines of the Lower Potomac River Valley,” *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 8 (1938):30; Alice L. L. Ferguson and Henry G. Ferguson, *The Piscataway Indians of Southern Maryland* (Accokeek, Md.: Alice Ferguson Foundation, 1960), 43; Robert L. Humphrey and Mary Elizabeth Chambers, *Ancient Washington: American Indian Cultures of the Potomac Valley* (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1977), 20; Paul Byron Cissna, “The Piscataway Indians of Southern Maryland: An Ethnohistory from Pre-European Contact to the Present” (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1986), 200.

3. David H. Landis, “Conoy Indian Town and Peter Bezaillion,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 37 (1933):123; Barry C. Kent, *Susquehanna’s Indians* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1984), 392; Christian F. Feest, “Nanticoke and Neighboring Tribes,” in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, ed. by Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 246; Pennsylvania Archives, *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, vol. 9, *Containing the Proceedings of Council from October 15th, 1762, to 17th of October, 1771, Both Days Included* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1852), 390; C. A. Weslager, *The Nanticoke Indians: A Refugee Tribal Group of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1948), 62; “A List of Indians of Six Nations Present at Treaty at Easton, 1758,” *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3 (1758): 558; William L. Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant-Thayendanegea: Including the Border Wars of the American Revolution, and Sketches of the Indian Campaigns of Generals Harmar, St. Clair, and Wayne, and Other Matters Connected with the Indian Relation of the United States and Great Britain, from the Peace of 1783 to the Indian Peace of 1795* (New York: Alexander V. Blake, 1838), 3–4.

4. Hendrick Aupaumut, “A Narrative of an Embassy to the Western Indians from the Original Manuscript of Hendrick Aupaumut, with Prefatory Remarks by Dr. B. H. Coates,” *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2 (1827): 97 [note: Kuhnauwautheew = Conoy]; Helen Hornbeck Tanner, “The Glaize in 1792: A Composite Indian Community,” *Ethnohistory*, 25 (1978): 19.

5. Papers of the War Department, “Indian Council Refuses to Meet U.S. Commissioners,” [wardepartmentpapers.org](http://wardepartmentpapers.org), accessed January 25, 2010.

6. Feest, *Nanticoke*, 242; William Hand Browne et al., eds., *Archives of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883–1972), 25:256 (hereinafter cited *Arch. Md.*).

7. Wm. P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts, 1652–1781, Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1875), 63–65. Feest, *Nanticoke*, 242, takes this number of eighty to ninety bowmen literally as men/warriors and

estimates the Conoy population at 265–300. If one were to use five to seven people per cabin to estimate population, the twenty-seven cabins at Heater’s Island would indicate a total of 135–190 people. Palmer, *Calendar*, 67. If this same 4:1 people:warrior ratio is applied to Vanderasteal and Harison’s estimate of twenty men, and assuming another twenty were “in the Inhabitance” or “outt a hunting,” the total population would be about one hundred sixty.

8. *Arch. Md.*, 26:376–77; Vincent H. Todd, ed., *Christoph von Graffenried’s Account of the Founding of New Bern* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1920).

9. Pennsylvania Archives, *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, vol. 8, *Containing the Proceedings of Council from January 13th, 1757, to 4th of October, 1762, Both Days Included* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1852), 176.

10. Tanner, *The Glaize* 18–20; Piscataway/Conoy oral history relates that at least some of the Western Indian Confederacy Conoy walked back to Maryland following the Battle of Fallen Timbers (Gabrielle Tayac, personal communication, 2010).

11. Gabrielle Tayac reminds me that this may be an oversimplification and has posited that the Conoy may have split into two groups while at Shamokin (ca. 1743), with one faction later moving to Iroquoia and the other joining the Western Indian Confederacy. For more information, see Gabrielle Astra Tayac, “To Speak with One Voice: Supra-Tribal American Indian Collective Identity Incorporation among the Piscataway, 1500–1998” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999); 19. *Arch. Md.* 24:145–46; Kent, *Susquehanna’s Indians*, 72; Feest, *Nanticoke*, 246; William B. Marye, “Patowmeck above ye Inhabitants (Part 1),” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 30 (1935): 5–6. As early as 1701, Conoy (Ganowese) representatives attended a meeting with William Penn in Philadelphia and received permission to settle in Pennsylvania. In 1705, shortly after the outbreak of smallpox on Heater’s Island, the Piscataway petitioned the governor of Pennsylvania for permission to settle in Tulpenhocken. By October of that year, at least some Piscataway were in the Conestoga (Lancaster) region where James Logan visited them, presumably at Conejoholo on the east side of the Susquehanna River. The absence of any mention of an Indian village or fort at the location of Heater’s Island on Philemon Lloyd’s 1721 map, “Patowmeck above ye Inhabitants,” provides circumstantial evidence that the Piscataway had abandoned the island by 1721. “Memoranda” attached to Lloyd’s map (“. . . ye Cunnoyes [Conoy]; A Numerous Poeople [sic] wch heretofore Inhabited ye Upper Parts of yt River . . .”) seem to indicate that the Piscataway had left the region well before 1721. Gabrielle Tayac, *We Rise, We Fall, We Rise: A Descendant of the Capital City’s Original Inhabitants Comes Home* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2004); National Museum of the American Indian, *We Have a Story to Tell: Native Peoples of the Chesapeake Region* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2006), 8; *Arch. Md.*, 28:93–96.